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STATE FOR OES/WATSON, TALLEY AND THOMPSON STATE PASS TO CEQ CONNAUGHTON DOE FOR INTERNATIONAL/FREDRIKSEN AND BALLOU EPA FOR INTE

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [SENV](#) [ENRG](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: CHENGDU MANIPULATING AIR QUALITY DATA?

REF: A. 2007 BEIJING 07110      B. 2008 BEIJING 00037

1. (SBU) This cable contains sensitive but unclassified information - not for distribution on the Internet.

2. (SBU) Summary: Official data published on the Ministry of Environmental Protection website strongly suggests that Chengdu air quality data is being manipulated to appear cleaner than it is, despite official claims that the data from local air quality monitors is aggregated and sent to Beijing automatically. Both the Sichuan provincial-level Environmental Protection Bureau and the Chengdu Environmental Protection Bureau claim air quality in Chengdu to be gradually improving, but already in general "very good." Apparent manipulation going back to at least 2001 makes it difficult to verify this claim. End Summary.

What Officials Say about the Air

3. (SBU) The Director of Science and Technology and International Cooperation at Sichuan's provincial-level Environmental Protection Bureau, Zhao Lechen, told Congenoff recently that Chengdu's air quality data is gathered by eight air quality monitors spread throughout the city. He said that the monitors are generally placed on top of buildings and reported data automatically to back to a regional control center in Chengdu. The data is then passed automatically to Beijing, where it is posted on the Ministry of Environmental Protection's website. Zhao asserted that the city's air quality is improving gradually over time.

4. (SBU) The Deputy Director at Chengdu's Environmental Protection Bureau, Shen Shaoji, also claimed that data from local air quality monitoring stations is transmitted automatically to Beijing. Shen said that moves to reduce pollution, such as banning coal burning inside the city's third ring road, restrictions on the use of government vehicles by one day per week, and encouraging residents who lived less than 1.2 miles from work to avoid driving to work has contributed to the claimed increase in air quality in the city. Both Shen and Zhao said that while Chengdu could further improve its air quality, air quality is in general far better than in cities like Beijing.

Comments

5. (SBU) Both Shen and Zhao were very optimistic about Sichuan and Chengdu's environmental conditions and outlook, and neither told Congenoff that the city faced any significant challenges. China defines excellent and good air quality as a day having an air pollution index (API) value between 0 - 100. Analysis of Chengdu's air quality data between 1 January 2001 and 15 September 2008 shows that during those years there were many days on which air pollution exceeded an API of 100, but were recorded as being lower than 100. This year, from 1 January to 15 September, Chengdu recorded 62 days with an API 91-100, but only 2 days with a value of 101-110. This is consistent with air quality data manipulation techniques discussed in refTel.

6. (SBU) In a normal distribution of data, one would expect to see approximately 23 more days with an API 101-110. The same pattern of data manipulation holds true for previous years. In 2007 Chengdu recorded 77 days between API 91-100, and only 6 between 101-110. For the entire data set from 2001-2008, Chengdu reported 620 days between API 91-100, about 80 percent more than would be expected in this random set of pollution data. Days between 101-110 were less than half of their normal distribution for a data set.

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